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The Lord's Prayer in Time of War

BY
ELIZABETH WORDSWORTH

Oxford

B. H. BLACKWELL, BROAD STREET

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Most of us will have felt that in very many ways, the present war has affected our lives. To many of us it has brought the loss, or at all events the absence of a husband, son, or brother. All of us are feeling its effects in being pinched—more or less—as regards food, coals, money and little comforts.

The world seems very grave, very serious, perhaps in some ways more so for women than for men. Surely, then, the war ought to have a place in our prayers. Many of us no doubt go to Church, and join in the special collects, litanies and hymns.

But after awhile, perhaps, we get a little too familiar with them, perhaps a little tired of them. Yet there is one prayer, the meaning of which we never have exhausted and never shall exhaust—I mean the Lord's Prayer. It consists of only fifty-six words—seventy with the doxology. Has there ever been so much meaning crowded into seventy words before? Often and often we have repeated them, but have we ever entered into their fulness? Perhaps the joys and sorrows of our own lives have at different times shewn us different aspects of their meaning. But does not this war seem to make the old words

live afresh with new and unexpected reality? Let us try and go through the Prayer yet once again.

Our Father. What should that teach us? When a child speaks of his father he means some one who has perhaps half a dozen other children, and who (let us hope) loves and cares for them. But God is not *my* Father only, but *our* Father. Father of every one in all the four quarters of the globe,—of black people as well as white ones; of the departed as well as the living. Then, He must be the Father of our enemies. Is it not good to remember this? We sometimes speak of our enemies by very harsh names, and wish them all kinds of harm. Surely this is not a Christian spirit. We ought to pray God to 'forgive our enemies, and to turn their hearts.' Many of them are very ignorant, very helpless, and suffer far more than we are doing ourselves. Many of them have been grossly misled by those in authority. In many cases we ought rather to pity than blame them. But let us think of God as our Father from another point of view. Are not some of us just now very bitter against God? A man or woman loses an only son in the war. Perhaps you hear them say, 'Oh, I *used* to believe in God as a just God, but I never can again. If there be a God at all, He must be very cruel, thus to rob me of the light of mine eyes.' How many people are *feeling* that, if they do not actually say it, now? But let us look at the Prayer again. Our Father **which art in heaven.** As the wise man says (Eccl. v. 2), 'Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter

anything before God ; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few.' If you were to go up to a high mountain, or a cathedral tower, things would look very different to you from what they do down below. You would see whither the roads were leading ; you would look at long distances instead of short ones ; you would be a much better judge of life as a whole. Now we only see our lives in little bits. God sees them as a whole. When Joseph was in the pit, he might have thought it was very cruel of God to allow his brethren to treat him as they did. But God knew a great deal more about Joseph and his future life than Joseph did himself, and Joseph himself lived to own this. (Gen. xlv. 5, 8 ; l. 20). So it is with many of our troubles now. A time may come when we shall see, and acknowledge the wisdom, aye, and the love of God, in sending them, hard as we find them now to bear. There are times when even a loving earthly father has to seem harsh and cruel to his son, just *because* he loves Him. Even so it is with our Heavenly Father, as we shall one day acknowledge.

Hallowed be Thy Name. Now, what do most of us mean when they say these words? Perhaps they have a vague idea that we ought to behave reverently in Church, or when we read our Bibles. Here, again, the war has put a new meaning into the old words. Surely one thing they imply is that we ought to keep our Sundays holy. Before the war began England was fast losing its Sundays. The rich got to think of them more as days of amuse-

ment, the poor, very often, as days of idleness, or in some cases of making money in ministering to the rich. How is it with us now? We are very, very far behind what we ought to be, but many rich and prosperous men have—thank God—put their amusements and pleasures on one side and gone out to fight, perhaps to die, for their country, and to bear hardships often worse than death, and those who remain are drawn to prayer and to church going in a way they never were before. Many a man in the trenches, with bombs and shells falling around him, must—when Sunday comes round—think of the quiet country village where he lived, of the bells ringing for church, of the worshippers coming by twos and threes across the meadows or along the lanes, of the old, old prayers and hymns, and say to himself, 'I wonder if at home they are now praying for *me*!' And, perhaps, he goes on to say, 'Well, if God spares my life, and I go back to England, Sunday shall be kept by me in a very different way, in a much better way, than of old.' Think, too, of our prisoners of war. What would not *they* give for an English Sunday? One might go on to say the same of God's Word. How the men in the trenches have prized their Bibles and Testaments, or even one single Gospel which they can carry about. They are not now ashamed to be seen praying. Many welcome the opportunity of going to the Holy Communion. When we say 'Hallowed be Thy Name,' do we not pray for them, and for ourselves also, that our Sundays, our Bibles, our Churches, our Sacraments may be more prized by us than ever they were

before? And do we not also pray that the misuse of God's sacred name in swearing and foolish talking and jesting may be checked and done away with?

Thy kingdom come. These three words are full and overflow with meaning. They make us think of God's kingdom as a vast onward procession, like that of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, while the crowd gathered volume as it went, and more and more eager hands strewed palm branches and garments, and more and more voices loudly sang Hosanna! That procession has never stopped; it never will stop as long as the world lasts. Our Lord is still riding on in triumph. This war, horrible as it is, is helping to prepare His way. It is breaking-up and breaking-down old barriers, old obstacles. When the war is over, things will not be just as they were before. In many ways we shall begin afresh, or, as the saying is, 'with a clean slate.' Race hatred, class hatred and suspicion will have received a serious blow. The relations between men and women will be better understood, and selfishness will have had a lesson it should not soon forget. The Protestant will see there is some good in the Roman Catholic; the Churchman, in the Nonconformist. Beside a soldier's deathbed and the great realities in which we all agree, lesser things seem to retire into the background. That is one aspect of the coming of God's kingdom, but it is not the only one.

'The kingdom of God,' our Lord says (Luke xvii. 20), 'cometh not with observation. The kingdom of God is within you.' Unless that kingdom is within us, in

our own hearts, all the religious observances in the world avail but little. Suppose you are in a church or any large public building, where there is a great display of electric lamps. They may be handsome, expensive, well-adorned and arranged, but what is all that display unless a switch is touched by some perhaps invisible hand and every lamp becomes a radiant point of light? Unless the electricity of God's grace—that wonderful unseen thing—touches our souls, all our outward religious forms are vain.

When we pray 'Thy kingdom come,' let us pray for that electric touch on our souls. Let us pray that God may touch our souls, our children's souls, the souls of all with whom we have to do, clergy and laity alike. Let us pray that every one who is trying to convey the kingdom of God to others may have it first in himself or herself. That kingdom cometh not with observation; we cannot *see* it coming, but it *will* come, it *does* come, and the man or woman to whom it comes helps to carry it on to others. And, oh! if only every father and mother in England had the kingdom of God in their own hearts, how different our homes would be!

Then we ought to pray for the spread of the Gospel. We ought to pray that God's kingdom may come by our Home and Foreign Missions throughout the world. Many of us know, but others do not, what an amount of heathenism there is in this so-called Christian England, (especially in our large towns):—unbaptized children, unwedded parents, men and women who not only never attend a place of worship of any kind, but who never hear or speak the

name of God, except in profane swearing. Ought we not to remember them in our prayers, and do what we can to help them? Again, we have had many soldiers from India, of various races and religions, fighting at our side, and loyally helping us in this war. Should not we pray that this brotherhood in arms may be a step towards a brotherhood in Faith?

Perhaps each of us knows *one* good clergyman or lady teacher doing missionary work. Could we not remember him or her in our prayers? They tell us themselves how they need it. Thus and thus only can the world be prepared, as we all should pray it may be, for the second coming of Christ, (Matt. xxiv. 14).

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven.

Here we must begin by saying that it is very difficult to give in English the exact idea of the original. In the Greek, there is really nothing about *doing*. It is more as if we prayed, 'May Thy will be fulfilled,' or 'take place,' or 'come to pass.' The Latin, 'Fiat voluntas tua,' comes much more closely to it.

We English people are naturally very active, and like *doing* things, and this is partly perhaps due to the rendering of this petition in the Lord's Prayer. It is like that proverb some of us are so fond of quoting, 'Laborare est orare' ('To work is to pray'). We fix our eyes, not so much on God's will, as on our own doings. But we must remember the petition asks, not only that we may *do* God's will, but that we may accept it.

To begin with the first of these two ideas. In order to do God's will we must know it. The angels

who do God's will in heaven have no difficulty in knowing it. But we, perhaps, sometimes have. We must begin therefore by asking God to make His will clear to us. 'Shew me Thou the way that I should walk in.' We may be standing at cross roads sometimes, and really not quite sure which road we should take. It is a part of our duty to take great pains to ascertain what our duty is, by prayer, by thought, by asking good advice, and by studying our Lord's example, so far as it bears on our own conduct. Many people do not give themselves the trouble to think before they act. They act hastily, and instead of doing God's will they are only following their own impulses, and often do more harm than good. But there are times when we really do very plainly know God's will, and yet do not carry it out. Suppose, for instance, you have a child. God's will for that child in most ordinary cases is that it should grow up good and beautiful and healthy and happy. Now parents can, to a great extent, thwart and hinder that will of God. A father or mother who drinks or squanders the money which ought to be spent on the home, who lets children go ill-fed, ill-clad, ill-shod, and lets them pick up bad words and bad habits, who does not look after their health, their eyesight, etc., and does not teach them good, wholesome, cleanly habits, and train them to be useful, is just as much thwarting and hindering the will of God as a clownish boor who stamps with his heavy boots on a beautiful growing flower,—only the child's soul is a thousand, ten thousand, times more precious than the flower. And what is true of parents is true also of teachers, and of

all who are in any way answerable for others ;—employers of labour, army and navy officers, artists, literary men, and indeed every man and woman among us.

But we must *accept* God's will, as well as do it. Was there ever a time when this lesson was more needed than now. How many among us have to learn, for the first time in their lives, to say 'Thy will be done' in *that* sense? One of the saddest things in the war is that a number of soldiers have been blinded. Think what that must be for a man to face,—a fine, active, vigorous man, never to see the light of day again, never to see his parents, or his wife, or his children ! To be dependent on others, and an object of pity, though of pride and gratitude also, wherever he goes ! I have already spoken of the prisoners of war, but one must think once more how very hard are the lessons of patience and submission and privation they all have to learn. May God help them from their hearts to say 'Thy will be done.' Then there are all the mourners, the widows, the fatherless children, and, what is perhaps even sadder, the childless parents. Then there are those whose business has been ruined, tradesmen who have lost their customers, and many others on whom the war presses heavily. Perhaps we ourselves may be of the number. May not such as these also find it hard to say 'Thy will be done,' and shall we not ask God to help them and us ?

'They also serve who only stand and wait,' wrote a great English poet, John Milton, who had

mixed actively in the politics of the day, and who lost his sight from cataract and in consequence of overwork, and had to give up his old activities. That line must have been a comfort to thousands, but there are many who never heard it who live in its spirit.

One sometimes sees a bedridden old woman in a workhouse infirmary, who has lain there for years, a useless log. Yet even she can submit to, and thus can *do*, God's will. If she is cheerful, patient, contented and grateful, if she sets a good example, if she prays and tries to lead others to pray, if she spends her time in intercession for those whose lives are busier than her own, if she is doing all that she can, and bearing her trial in a right spirit—such a life may be really as pleasing to God, and as glorious in His eyes as that of a brave young officer, who is shot down while cheering his battalion on to victory. Only He Who reads the heart can tell which of these is best doing His will—if indeed it be necessary to make any comparisons at all.

'Give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt,' said an old Father of the Church. Obedience is the chief thing. The angels, we may be sure, obey God in all things, great or small. For in a certain sense nothing is great, and in another sense nothing is small in the eyes of our heavenly Father.

Give us this day our daily bread. This is to many of us the easiest petition in the Lord's Prayer. We may find it difficult to think of God's Name, His kingdom, His will—but daily bread is a thing we can see and taste. We know what it costs to buy, and

we know how dependent we are upon it. And even the explanation given in the Catechism, of 'all things needful for our souls and bodies' does not seem difficult to us—at all events where our bodies are concerned. Food and drink, clothing and shelter, it comes naturally to us to pray for these. But here, again, it is not '*my* daily bread' which we ask for, but '*our* daily bread.' We should be little better than hypocrites, if when saying these words we thought all we were asking for was our own comforts. Do we ever think how many Poles, Armenians and Belgians are starving at this moment, to say nothing of others nearer home—and can we honestly say this prayer, and not do what we can to help them? In this country, even now in war time, there is a great deal of carelessness and waste and selfish extravagance. If we would take the trouble to realize a little what others are suffering, and how thankful they would be for what we often waste, we should be less unworthy to join in this petition of the Lord's Prayer—and also more thankful for our own blessings. Even high prices have their use, in reminding us how dependent we are on God's mercy for things we are too apt to take as a matter of course. But, after all, our Lord, Who taught us this prayer, also said 'Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.' (John vi. 27). No doubt this specially refers to the Holy Communion, and in saying this prayer we should think most of that, and prize this Sacrament far more than we do, and pray that our souls may be strengthened and refreshed thereby. But must we

not also think of all the other ways in which the soul is fed, by prayer, reading, and meditation, by converse with friends, by the beauty of nature, by the highest kind of music, and by the grace of God's Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts? We pray—at least let us hope we do—for those who are suffering bodily hunger—but what about the starving souls? It was not Lazarus whose soul was starving, but the rich man. If the rich man had been alive now, we might have seen him driving about in a fur coat in a motor, and we might have seen the poor man shivering in his rags—but there is many a starving soul beneath the purple and fine linen, and many a soul, fed by the grace of God, beneath a poor disguise. Of course, there are rich men who are good, and poor men who are wicked. But we must not confound bodily well-being with spiritual well-being.

In all classes and in all ranks, in all lands there are many, many starving souls. Ought we not to think of them also when we say this prayer?

Then, too, how many souls are starving for want of a little love and sympathy? That is a thing even the poorest can give. The world sometimes seems very hard, very heartless—as heartless as a piece of machinery. But have we never ourselves been comforted by a sympathetic look, a few kind words, a trifling present, or an unexpected letter? In these days, when so many people are left lonely, they prize more than ever the sight of a kind face, or the sound of a kind voice. It is indeed part of their 'daily bread,' and we should feel it a privilege to be able to

give them comfort in ways like these. 'I was sick, and ye visited me ; I was a stranger, and ye took me in.' It is our Lord Himself Who says these words.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. This petition is one that comes close home to most of us. There may be a few persons here and there who are not conscious of having sinned, and others who think that sin is something they cannot help, and therefore have no need to repent of. But the majority of us are not so blind as that. We know that we *have* sinned, and that we are sinning every day. Our consciences tell us that, many times when we might and ought to have resisted temptation, we weakly and wrongfully yielded to it. If we were to die to-night, many sins would rise up to accuse us, and to make us tremble at the thought of the life to come. But He Who has taught us to pray for forgiveness, has also shed His Blood to cleanse us from our sins, and to obtain pardon for them from God. It is, however, certain that we cannot honestly say this prayer for forgiveness unless we really repent and intend to amend our lives. God only, Who reads the heart, can know whether we are, or are not sincere, when we come before Him with this prayer on our lips. Forgiveness is offered us on two conditions, first, of our sincere repentance, and secondly of our forgiveness of others. 'Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven,' says our Lord. Sometimes we find it very easy to forgive ; sometimes very hard. A woman, perhaps, who has reason to think that another woman is supplanting

her in her husband's affections—can she forgive? She cannot say that wrong is right; she cannot say that to act in such a way is not a sin; she cannot help feeling burning indignation in her heart. What ought she to do? How ought she to feel? First of all she must try to give no provocation herself, to do nothing of which her husband has any right to complain. Then she ought to feel very sorry for those who are doing wrong (for after all to live in sin is the greatest of all possible misfortunes). She ought to pray God to turn their hearts; she ought to do everything she can to bring about a better state of things; she ought to be as patient and forbearing as she can. In time, perhaps, her patience may be rewarded; and if so, she ought to be willing to be reconciled. But at any rate, she ought not to wish ill, even to those who hurt and injure her. She ought to govern her tongue and control her thoughts. And she must remember that, if God sets a hard task before us, it is for the training and perfecting of our own characters, and to enable us in time to be a comfort and help to others. When God has forgiven us so much, ought not we, too, to be ready to forgive?

But note the words, 'Forgive us our trespasses.' In saying this prayer we do not only pray for our own forgiveness but that others may be forgiven. Just now, we ought specially to pray for the forgiveness of national sins, for pardon for 'our pride, boastfulness, and self-sufficiency, for covetousness, worldliness, and indifference to the needs of others.' If we belong to the English nation and are proud of our country, we must also be penitent for our country.

The prophet Daniel confessed, not his own sins only, but the sins of his people (Dan. ix. 20), and ought not we to do the same? We must ask God to forgive us English people our pride, our selfishness, our drunkenness and vice, our Sabbath-breaking, our dishonesty in business, our living so often 'without God in the world.' And, as has been already said, we must forgive even our enemies, and try, so far as in us lies, to return good for evil. And this brings us to the last petition of all,

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Life, we know, is full of temptations, and it is through resisting them that the Saints obtain their crown. 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him' (James i. 12). We do not pray never to be tempted, but we pray not to be tried beyond our strength, and in so doing we must remember that we must not run *ourselves* into temptation, by seeking things which lead us astray. A man or woman who is tempted to drink can avoid the door of the public house, even if he or she have a few minutes' longer walk home to do so. A young man or a girl can avoid bad companions, and those who are likely to lead them wrong, and seek good ones. An angry man can try and not listen to ill-natured stories about the person who displeases him. A man or woman tempted to dishonesty can try to restore whatever he has unjustly gained. Ought we not also to be very

careful not to lead others into temptation, by letting our children see us angry or dishonest, or hear us using bad words, or by letting our girls go into bad company, or by lending our children bad books or letting them read newspapers full of horrors or go to see 'moving pictures' which represent murders and other evil things? or by letting them get into the habit of drinking beer or spirits which they would be much better without? And here again we must pray, not only for ourselves, but for all who are tempted—the girl who has come to her first place, or is in a shop, or the boy who is in the army or navy or in some business, and for many, many others whom we know or can think of. Who knows how far our prayer may go?

Above all, let us remember that when we are fighting temptation we have God on our side. Many of us, in this war, are encouraged by the thought that ours is a righteous cause, and that God will help us to win it. May He grant it! But at any rate, if we try to fight sin and resist temptation, we have God as our most powerful ally, and this thought should give us courage and help.

Next we pray to be 'delivered from Evil' or 'from the Evil one.' Whatever else this awful war may have done or not done, it has at all events made us feel the reality and the horribleness of evil. Indescribable cruelties and brutalities, unfaithfulness, lying, dishonourable conduct, sacrilege, inhuman methods of warfare, all these things tend to make us feel, what some of us in the comfortable and prosperous times before war were tempted to deny, that there

is such a being as Satan who lures people on to worse and worse barbarity and degradation, and seems to turn men themselves into devils. Evil has suddenly grown gigantic and overwhelming before our eyes. The very image of Christ on the cross is desecrated and defaced. Nothing is sacred, nothing is safe before this awful spirit of evil.

Our Catechism tells us that this petition teaches us to pray that God 'will save and defend us in all dangers both of soul and body (what a fulness of meaning the last year or two has added to these words!) and that he will keep us from all sin and wickedness, and from our ghostly (spiritual) enemy, and from everlasting death.' Must we not face the fact that there *is* such a being as Satan, and such a place as hell? People call the trenches 'hell' sometimes, and shudder even at the recollection of what they have seen and felt there. Yet many very good and brave men have been in the midst of it. But if God allows *good* people to have this awful experience of hell upon earth, dare we refuse to face the fact that evil men must in another world have a still more terrible doom before them? We are very apt to put the idea of hell on one side, we say it is too horrible, or we say we cannot understand or accept the doctrine of everlasting punishment. That, perhaps, is one of the problems we are not intended to solve in this life, we cannot grasp the idea of Eternity; we must leave the matter in God's hands. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' But the experience of the last two years should make us feel that sin is not a thing to be trifled with, and that

the future of our own souls has some very awful possibilities. We should not make light of God's warnings, but try to forsake everything that displeases Him.

For thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen. This beautiful doxology, which from time immemorial has been appended to the Lord's Prayer, seems to gain a fresh meaning in times like the present. We hear much of the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms, of earthly power, and earthly glory, but how small they all are when we think of the Creator of the world and of the tiny speck which this globe of ours is, compared with the universe! Compared with God's kingdom, power, and glory, the greatest displays of human power, the utmost brilliancy of human glory seem small indeed. Supposing we are at one of the seats of war, and see ruined towns and churches, and the bodies of slaughtered soldiers. We see something of the destructive powers which man can wield, and we mourn over the hideous ruin which has been wrought. But we go a little further, and in some sheltered nook we see spring flowers growing as usual. Where is the power in the world that could make one snow-drop bulb push forth a green shoot, and the shoot produce a bud, and the bud rise up gradually into a lovely, delicate flower? What earthly potentate can make a toddling baby grow up through boyhood into manhood? Every one of these poor corpses round us represents what was, not long ago, a miracle of God's creative power.

What a miracle is man ! His sight, his hearing, his bodily structure, all the wonderful faculties God has given him ! We can make shells and machine guns, we can kill men like flies, but in every man thus killed, we have destroyed something that all the science and skill in the world are unable to reproduce. Happily we cannot kill his soul, nor can we destroy that by which God is truly glorified, his courage, his faith, and his self-sacrifice.

Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Supposing you possess an old collection of coins, or go to look at them in a museum, you will see on the gold and silver and copper money of olden time the heads of kings and emperors—like the penny brought to our Lord which had Cæsar's image and superscription. Here are the likenesses of the great monarchs of old, here are the inscriptions which commemorate their greatness. What has become of it all now ? Who cares about them ? Some child perhaps yawns over their names in a history school-book. But *their* kingdom, their power and glory, once so famous, is now a mere shadow. So will it be in one or two hundred years with those who now boast the 'kingdom, power, and glory' of this world. Their kingdom will come to an end, their power be extinct, their glory a shadowy recollection.

But God's kingdom, His power, His glory, is to human glory what the sun is to a rushlight. There is no comparison between them. And is it not good for us sometimes to forget ourselves entirely, and to

forget the cares and troubles of our brief life here below, and to adore Him Whose Kingdom and Power and Glory are everlasting, and yet Who tells us that He is love, and condescends to accept the love and gratitude of our poor human hearts, and to call Himself our Father ?

In conclusion, let us remember that we are never saying the Lord's Prayer alone. We may be alone in our own room, our own house, or with very few others at some week day service. But our prayer is like some little streamlet which joins a mighty river. The force of a great river is a wonderful thing, but that force is produced by the union of a thousand rills and brooks, fed by the mountain snows, or the raindrops that trickle down the roofs. In saying the Lord's Prayer we unite ourselves with all God's Saints. Just as in the Holy Communion we are united through Christ, with God Himself, and with ' the blessed company of all faithful people ', so the moment we have partaken of it, the very first words we utter are those of the Lord's Prayer. Let this be a comfort to us all, especially to the lonely and bereaved among us. When we say the Lord's Prayer we are brought near to God our Father and to our brethren and sisters, known and unknown, who have uttered or are uttering these very words. Our little drop of prayer mingles with the great stream, and our praise forms part of the grand chorus which all Creation utters to our Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

Paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer.

O HEAVENLY FATHER, give us grace, we pray,
To reverence Thy Name, Thy Word, Thy Day ;
Lord, may Thy kingdom come in every heart,
And we to others Thy true light impart !
Help us to do and to accept Thy will,
Even as the angels Thy behests fulfil.
Give us this day, O Lord, our daily bread,
And, as our bodies, may our souls be fed.
Lord, pardon all our sins, both small and great,
As we do others : bid us love, not hate !
Help us by grace temptation's force to quell,
And save our souls from Satan, death, and hell :
For Thine is the dominion, power, and praise,
Both now and ever, through eternal days. *Amen.*

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